

IMPROVING THE STUDENTS' GRAMMAR MASTERY THROUGH EGRA TECHNIQUE

Fia Renny Syahara*, A Dahlan Raism, Dewi Sri Wahyuni

Email: fiarennys@gmail.com.

ABSTRACT

This classroom action research is aimed at finding out whether EGRA can improve the students' grammar mastery and the strengths and weaknesses of EGRA to the class VIII of SMP N 1 Jaten Karanganyar. It was conducted in two cycles. Quantitative and qualitative data gathered indicates that EGRA effectively improve the students' grammar mastery. The mean score of the test result is 56.7 for pre-test, 68.8 for the post-test 1 and 91.8 for the post-test 2. On the one hand, the research proves that (1) EGRA enhance the students' grammar concept, (2) Generalization stage in EGRA steps pump up the students' discovery in learning structures of a sentence and (3) EGRA technique can be a tool of motivator to build the students' awareness in learning grammar. On the other hand, it is time consuming in generalization stage and the students sometimes get bored with repeated explanation on structures.

Keywords: Grammar mastery, EGRA, Classroom Action Research.

INTRODUCTION

It is no doubt that English language plays an important role in world wide life including Indonesia. English is applied in almost all aspects of life. It is needed for international transaction, looking for a job, going abroad and so on. Furthermore, the language is used to transfer knowledge in many schools such as RSBI and SBI School. In this era, English mastery is one of the indicators of qualified person. So, it can be said that English is necessary for everyone.

In Indonesia, there are not many students who are interested in improving their English communication skill. Therefore, the country stresses on the use of English in school education in order to equip its students with the proficiency of English communication both in spoken and written form. The communicative competence covers four competences namely grammatical, sociolinguistics, discourse and strategic (Savignon, 1997: 40).

Grammar is one of the essential skill should be mastered by students. The skill deals with knowing how to form sentences and use it in appropriate way. Lock (1997: 1) argues that grammar is a set of rules which specify all the possible grammatical structures of the language including two aspects. They are the arrangement of words and the internal structure of word. In line with Lock, Brown (1994: 347) states that grammar is a system of rules governing the conventional arrangement and relationship of words in a sentence. Savignon (1997: 40) says that person demonstrates grammatical competence not by stating the rules, but by using rules. According to her, grammatical competence is mastery of linguistics codes, the ability to recognize the lexical, morphological, syntactic and phonological feature of a language and to manipulate these features to form words and sentences. It involves the ability to apply the grammatical rules in order to form grammatically correct sentences.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GRAMMAR

Students need to have a good grammar foundation to communicate effectively in English (McKay, 1987). Ur (1988) states that a person who knows

grammar is one who can express himself or herself in what would be considered as acceptable language forms. In KTSP (School Based Curriculum of Indonesia), grammar is one of essential language elements taught to support the mastery of four skills namely listening, reading, speaking and writing. Besides, to achieve the standard and basic competence, the students need to understand grammar, vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation.

PROBLEM

In fact, the students still find many problems with grammar. Based on the pre-test result done by the students of class VIII E SMP N 1 Jaten, the students were still looked confused in identifying tenses rules and its application in a text. It was reflected from their score which was low, 56.7 in class average. Whereas in KTSP (School Based Curriculum of Indonesia), the KKM (Passing Grade) of English subject for class VIII in SMP N 1 Jaten is 73.

Meanwhile, from the result of questionnaire, 54.5 percent or 18 students from the total of 33 students felt difficult to recognize the change of V_1 to V_2 and V_3 . Then, 51.5 percent or 17 students of 33 students said that they were difficult to differentiate subject, verb, and object in an English sentence. As the result, 48.5 percent or 16 students of 33 students said that they were so difficult to form past tense sentences.

The condition of students' grammar mastery was supported by the teacher statement, she said, "*Kemampuan siswa pada grammar masih sangat kurang. Mereka saja masih bingung untuk membedakan perubahan kata kerja dari V_1 ke V_2 dan V_3*

apalagi menulis kalimat. Siswa itu juga belum semuanya memperhatikan saat guru menerangkan grammar. Hanya anak-anak yang pintar saja yang memperhatikan dan anak-anak yang masih kurang malah disambi main.

From the researcher's observation, the students were not interested and looked bored in English class. Some of them laid their heads on the table and did another activity rather than paid attention to the teacher. Besides, the students were also passively involved in teaching and learning process. When the teacher gave questions to them, they were dominantly silent and looked at the book.

CAUSES

The researcher found that the causes of the students' lack in grammar skill and motivation were seen from three factors. They were the teacher, the students and the teaching and learning activity. Firstly, some of the students said to the researcher that the teacher was too fast in explaining the materials. The consequence was the students did not get the point of the teacher's explanation. Besides, the researcher observed that the teacher used most of the time to discuss about text and exercise.

Secondly, the students had low motivation in learning English. Some of them thought that they were not necessary to learn English well because they were Javanese people. It means that they did not realize the importance of English. Thirdly, most of the students were bored with the monotonous teaching and learning activity. The variation of teaching and learning activities was rarely done in the class.

Teaching grammar needs to have an appropriate technique since grammar is sometimes neglected by students because of its boring activity. Memorizing the rules

with a serious condition is often occurred in a class. The students may be easy to remember but it is easy to forget also. It is the teacher's responsibility to create an interesting activity in grammar class. Yet, the teacher sometimes ignores it. Adenan (2002: 25) suggested that teachers should manage learning strategies suitable for students of a particular level in order to enhance language learning.

EGRA FOR TEACHING GRAMMAR

There are so many techniques to teach grammar, one of them is EGRA. EGRA stands for Experience/Exposure, Generalization, Reinforcement and Application. By using this technique, the students are given opportunity to find out the form and function of the sentence by themselves. Brown (1994: 351) says that it is built more intrinsic motivation by allowing the students to discover rules rather than being told them.

EGRA's steps have each objective. Experience is aimed to exposure a particular structure item in use. The objective of generalization is that learners better remember conclusion about form and function, they make by themselves. Reinforcement helps the students to check or revise their generalization and Application is to apply the structure items learned in the previous stage to communicate information or messages (Adrian, 1998).

Based on the finding, the writer concludes that the students' grammar mastery of class VIII E of SMP N 1 Jaten Karanganyar needs to be improved because it is still low. Therefore, the writer is interested to conduct a classroom action research through EGRA technique to improve the students' grammar mastery of class

VIII E of SMP N 1 Jaten Karanganyar. Based on the description in the background of the study above, the problems of the research can be formulated as follows:

1. Does EGRA technique improve the students' grammar mastery to the class VIII E of students of SMP N 1 Jaten Karanganyar in the academic year 2011-2012?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of using EGRA technique to improve the students' grammar mastery to the class VIII E of students of SMP N 1 Jaten Karanganyar in the academic year 2011-2012?

According to problem statement, the main objective of this research is to improve students' grammar mastery through EGRA technique.

Particularly, the research is to find out:

1. whether EGRA technique can effectively improve the students' grammar mastery to the class VIII E of students of SMP N 1 Jaten Karanganyar in the academic year 2011-2012.
2. the strengths and weaknesses of EGRA technique to improve the students' grammar mastery to the class VIII E of students of SMP N 1 Jaten Karanganyar in the academic year 2011-2012.

RESEARCH METODOLOGY

Action research is a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research (Watts in Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 1). Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001: 8) define action research as a study of a social situation carried out by those involved in that

situation in order to improve both their practice and the quality of their understanding. Mills (2003) states that action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers to gather information about the ways that their particular school operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn. The information gathered is aimed at enriching knowledge, developing reflective practice, giving positive changes in the school and on educators, and improving students' achievement.

Based on those definitions above, it can be concluded that action research is a process conducted by teacher researcher to describe, interpret and explain social situations while executing a change of intervention or practice using the techniques of research aimed at gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment and on educational practices in general, and improving student outcomes.

Feerance (2000: 9) mentions the steps of classroom action research are as follows:

1. Identify a Problem Area

Teacher researchers often have issue to investigate and observe. The first step in doing the action research is limiting the problem area and deciding the question to look for the answer. The success in planning will effect on the success on the research. Feerance (2009: 10) argues that there are several criteria to consider before investing the time and effort in “researching” a problem. The question should:

- a. be a higher-order question—not a yes/no
- b. be stated in common language, avoiding jargon
- c. be concise
- d. be meaningful
- e. not already have an answer

2. Gather Data

Data collection is important activity to decide the action will be conducted. Multiple sources of data are used to better understand the scope of happenings in the classroom or school. There are many vehicles for collection of data:

interviews	journals	audio tapes	case studies
portfolios	individual files	photos	surveys
diaries	logs of meetings	memos	student work,
field notes	videotapes	report cards,	questionnaires

To select technique of collecting data stated above, the researcher should consider the appropriateness the data with the issue being researched. The researcher can choose the easiest technique also. The data collected is suited with the necessity of the research in conducting the research.

3. Interpret Data

After the researchers feel enough in getting the data, they should analyze and identify the problems included in the data. Besides, the interpretation about the data is essential to be the reason for taking some actions.

4. Act on Evidence

The information gotten from the data interpretation is used to the consideration in designing a plan of some actions. The plan is as the proposed solutions of the problems occurred. The researcher should focus on the one essential issue to overcome in order to result a clear outcome.

5. Evaluate Results

After getting the reaction of the action happened, the research should reflect all the process of conducting the actions. It is done to measure whether there is improvement or not and the objectives of the research is achieved or not. If the objectives has not achieved yet, the researcher should revise the plan and choose another action to improve and reach the objectives of the research.

6. Next Steps

By considering the evaluation result of the action, the researcher will plan for the next activity. The next activity is determined by problems identified in the treatment. To overcome the problem, the researcher plan activities for better improvement.

DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the data including the students' score of pre and post test, field notes, observation, interview result, and photographs of teaching and learning process; the writer gains some findings answering the questions in the study.

There are two findings related to the research questions. The first is the improvement of students' grammar mastery. It can be seen from the students' score in grammar test. The following is the table describing the students' grammar score taken during the research:

Scoring	Pre-Test	Post-Test 1	Post-Test 2
Total Score	1870	2270	3030
Mean Score	$1870/33= 56.7$	$2270/33= 68.8$	$3030/33= 91.8$

From those scores, it is proved that EGRA technique can improve the students' grammar mastery.

The second finding is the strengths and the weaknesses of EGRA technique when it was implemented in the grammar class.

The improvement of students' grammar mastery and classroom situation can be found by implementing EGRA technique in the class. The followings are the detail explanation of each finding.

1. EGRA technique can improve the students' grammar mastery.

Before giving treatment, the teacher conducted pre-test. As the result, most of the students' achievement in grammar was categorized poor. It was proven by the mean of the score of pre-test, 56.7. Knowing this, the teacher planned the treatment to improve the students' grammar skill.

First cycle in this research consisted of three meetings. It showed that there was little improvement that the students achieved. The improvement could be seen from the increase of the students' test score and the improvement of the classroom situation. The grammar test covered the English grammar competences including morphology and syntax. The table below reflected the improvement that the students' score achieved. It was taken at the end of the first cycle.

Scoring	Pre-Test	Post-Test 1
Total Score	1870	2270
Mean Score	$1870/33 = 56.7$	$2270/33 = 68.8$

Besides, the classroom situation was also little improved. The students tried to show their good attitude in learning English especially grammar. Based on the researcher's observation, there were 17 students from the whole students totally 33 students or 52 percent who showed their activeness and seriousness in joining grammar class. The little improvement both in the students' grammar skill and classroom situation was caused by many factors such as the students were reluctant to do many tasks or it can be said that their motivation were still low and the researcher had not performed well in conducting the learning and teaching activity. Therefore, second cycle was taken.

The second cycle consisted of two meetings. It showed better improvement from cycle one to cycle two. The increase can be seen by comparing the score of previous post-test in the first cycle and the post-test in the second cycle. The

following is the table describing the students' score result which is taken from the end of the second cycle.

Scoring	Post-Test 1	Post-Test 2
Total Score	2270	3030
Mean Score	$2270/33 = 68.8$	$3030/33 = 91.8$

The scores above show the better improvement that the students reach in grammar understanding. From the classroom situation, the students also perform more active and serious in following the lesson. They act as active participant in learning grammar. They are not reluctant to do task, ask difficulties and correct their friends' mistake. From the researcher's observation, almost all students totally 30 from 33 students or 91 percent showed their activeness and seriousness in joining grammar class.

2. The strengths and the weaknesses of EGRA technique.

Every technique in teaching must have its strengths and weaknesses. EGRA as the technique of teaching grammar applied by the writer also has both strengths and weaknesses. The writer finds out the strengths of EGRA technique implemented in grammar teaching and learning conducted in class VIII E of students of SMP N 1 Jaten Karanganyar in the academic year 2011 – 2012. They are as follows:

a. EGRA can enhance the students' grammar concept.

Every step in EGRA can improve the students' grammar mastery. From experience where the students are exposed to the meaningful use of particular structure item; generalization which is improved the students' exploration in

recognizing the language structure; reinforcement sharpening and revising the students' findings in generalization and application when the students are given opportunities to use or apply the structure item that they have learned.

After getting some treatments, some students feel that they know deeper about grammar such as tenses and word categorization including subject, verb, object and complement. It is supported by the student's about her improvement after learning grammar through EGRA. *"Aku lebih mengerti tentang tenses bahasa Inggris dan lebih pintar bahasa Inggris pokoknya"*.

- b. Generalization stage in EGRA steps can pump up the students' discovery in learning structures of a sentence.

Independence learning is built up well in generalization since the researcher did not teach them about the structure of a certain tense. They tried to make the structure of a sentence in order to make them better remember conclusion about the form and function they make for themselves. This independence learning is supported by the argument of an expert. Rousseau (1712 –1778) in Benson (2001: 24) said that, "make your pupil attend to the phenomena of nature, and you will soon arouse his curiosity. But to nourish this curiosity, be in no hurry to satisfy it. Suggest problems but leave the solving of them to him. Whatever he knows, he should know not because you have told him, but because he has grasped it himself. Do not teach him science: let him discover it. If ever you substitute authority for reason in his mind, he will stop reasoning and become the victim of other people's opinion."

- c. EGRA technique can be a tool of motivator to build the students' awareness in learning grammar.

The students performed good attitude and motivation from meeting to meeting when the researcher implemented EGRA technique in teaching grammar in the class. In EGRA, the teacher can explore many activities in the class such as discussion, games and so on. Here, the researcher played role as a facilitator and motivator. She talked less and let the students explore their knowledge. It builds good mood on students' feeling because they are tend to be bored only in listening the researcher.

Otherwise, the implementation of EGRA technique in class VIII E of students of SMP N 1 Jaten Karanganyar in the academic year 2011 – 2012 also meets some weaknesses such as:

- 1) It requires much time allotment in generalization stage.

The generalization can be considered as the central of EGRA technique because the students are expected to make a discovery of language structure. The researcher did generalization phase in the form of sentences and paragraph analysis. The students needed much time in learning the sentences and paragraph. Sometimes, it spent all the time in a meeting. It is because the ability of the students in a class is different. Besides, their attention in learning grammar also has variation. Some students are motivated and the others are not. It needs more time to motivate the unmotivated students.

- 2) The students sometimes bored in meeting with structures many times.

EGRA consist of a sequence of instruction, moving from giving example, drawing generalization, providing reinforcement, and assigning tasks to students for application. As a sequence, the steps must be well organized. If a step does not pass well, it must be repeated. Based on the researcher's observation, the students who had understood looked bored when the researcher repeated the structure to the students who did not understand enough. Sometimes, they did another activity rather than paid attention to the repeated explanation.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that:

1. The implementation of EGRA as the technique in teaching grammar can improve the students' grammar mastery.

EGRA technique is suitable to improve the students' grammar skill to the class VIII E of SMP N 1 Jaten Karanganyar in the academic year 2011-2012. The improvement of the students' grammar skill can be seen from the result of the tests. The mean score of post test in the second cycle shows the significance improvement of the students' grammar mastery. The mean score of post test in the second cycle is 91.8. It is better than the mean score of the first cycle which is 68.8.

2. The implementation of EGRA as the technique in teaching grammar has both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths are:
 - a. EGRA can enhance the students' grammar concept.

- b. Generalization stage in EGRA steps can pump up the students' discovery in learning structures of a sentence.
- c. EGRA technique can be a tool of motivator to build the students' awareness in learning grammar.

While, the weaknesses of EGRA technique when it is implemented in teaching grammar to the class VIII E of students of SMP N 1 Jaten Karanganyar in the academic year 2011 – 2012 are:

- 1) It requires much time allotment in generalization stage.
- 2) The students get bored in meeting with structures many times.

Finally, the researcher would like give some suggestions dealing with the improvement of students' grammar mastery by using EGRA. Hopefully, the suggestions will be beneficial to whosoever regarding to improve the students' grammar skill including teachers, students, other researchers and institutions.

a. For teachers

The teacher should be more attention in teaching grammar to the students since strong grammar foundation will automatically create a better understanding in four main language skills. Many variations in teaching can be used. A student centered in learning is better applied because it has proven to make better concept and conclusion in the grammatical form and function. It is also expected that the teacher will try EGRA as the technique used to improve the students' grammar mastery.

b. For students

The students should be more aware about the importance of grammar in mastering English. Inner motivation will result better willingness in learning. Besides, the students should not be afraid of making errors in the use of grammar. To improve their grammar mastery, the students should be serious in learning and practicing structures. They should try to apply the grammatical form and function both in written and spoken.

c. For other researchers

It is expected that the other researchers can choose EGRA as a means of improving the students' grammar mastery with a better implementation and teaching media. The technique can be collaborated by another technique either. Besides, the other researcher can also conduct experimental or comparative technique in order to compare this technique with other techniques in teaching grammar.

d. For institution

The demand of better facilities in learning English cannot be neglected. SMP Negeri 1 Jaten should encourage and support the English teacher to improve the quality of teaching. The institution should provide facilities needed by both teachers and students in conducting effective teaching and learning process. The institution should facilitate various media and materials supporting teaching and learning process. Besides, the discussion between the institution and the English teacher should be done regularly in order to discuss about problems faced and find out its best solutions.

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